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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO BELARUS STATEMENT REGARDING U.S. SANCTIONS

Post is authorized to present the following statement at the March 13 Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.

Begin text:

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to comment on the March 11 statement issued by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Guidance on the Blocking of Property of Certain Persons Undermining Democratic Processes or Institutions in Belarus. Belarus asserted that the United States had in some way breached the commitments it undertook in the Helsinki Final Act by adding the Belneftekhim petrochemical company to the Treasury Department's list of Specially Designated Nationals. We are particularly baffled by the charge that our action is designed to further some illegitimate interest or infringe upon the sovereignty of the government of Belarus. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our actions are fully consistent with our OSCE obligations and commitments and are taken in support of the Belarusian people. As we all declared and agreed in Moscow in 1991, & commitments undertaken in the human dimension of the OSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern of all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.⁸

The U.S. has consistently and repeatedly informed the authorities in Belarus that we will continue to take actions against officials responsible for human rights abuses as well as against entities owned or controlled by such persons.

Our aim is to target only those who are involved in widespread human rights abuses; these sanctions are not targeted at the Belarusian people. Indeed, we are trying to help the people of Belarus exercise basic inalienable freedoms. We note many other OSCE participating States similarly sanction those responsible for abuses in Belarus.

Belarus has expressed its desire for improved relations with the United States. This is the path that we also prefer, and we have made clear our readiness to engage in a dialogue with Belarus on steps to improve our relations once all the political prisoners are free. We again urge the Belarusian authorities to release Aleksandr Kozulin to facilitate a dialogue on improved relations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

End text.

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